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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S J. FRAZER

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TAGS: KDEM PGOV PREL ZANU SF ZM
SUBJECT: MDC WILL STAY THE COURSE

Classified By: Ambassador Eric M. Bost. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Standing Committee, consisting of 19 leaders, met near Johannesburg, South Africa for a strategy meeting from January 6-8, 2009. In a January 9 meeting with Ambassador Bost, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai said the party leaders resolved to stick to its current position on joining a unity government only if Zanu-PF comes to agreement on previously stated outstanding issues. MDC expects that the parties will not come to agreement on outstanding issues and is preparing to implement Plan B - increasing pressure, domestically and internationally, on the regime led by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. Although Tsvangirai sees South Africa as the key to international pressure, he expects no change in Zimbabwe policy under President Kgalema Motlanthe and is uncertain whether it will change with the administration of African National Congress (ANC) President Jacob Zuma, who is expected to win presidential elections this year. Tsvangirai plans to return to Zimbabwe on January 15 or 16. End summary.

SOUTH AFRICA UNHELPFUL

¶2. (C) MDC's plan A focuses on settling outstanding issues with Mugabe before joining a unity government. Tsvangirai told Ambassador Bost he has not received a response to his letter requesting Motlanthe to host a meeting between Tsvangirai and Mugabe to resolve outstanding issues. When pressed, he said he did not think Motlanthe would agree to this request.

¶3. (C) Tsvangirai said South Africa is the only country that can change the situation in Zimbabwe, but he was skeptical that South Africa would use its power to pressure Zanu-PF. He said the South African Government (SAG) was structurally the same under Motlanthe as it was under former President Thabo Mbeki, with many of the same decision-makers. He thinks Mbeki is still driving SAG policy on Zimbabwe from behind the scenes. According to Tsvangirai, the SAG leadership continues to protect Mugabe because they think Mugabe is not the problem, rather part of the solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe. Ambassador Bost asked Tsvangirai for his interpretation of South Africa's motivations in regards to Zimbabwe policy. Tsvangirai said South Africa was committed to the solidarity of liberation movements and as a liberation party, Zanu-PF must be given the opportunity to recreate itself. He explained that Mbeki's policy on Zimbabwe was built on an anti-Western precept and the policy has not changed under Motlanthe's leadership.

TSVANGIRAI UNCERTAIN ABOUT ZUMA POLICY ON ZIMBABWE

¶4. (C) Ambassador Bost asked Tsvangirai whether South Africa's posture on Zimbabwe would change under Zuma's

leadership. He said he engages Zuma on a regular basis, but Zuma remains outside of the SAG's policy-making circle. Tsvangirai said he and Zuma are "equally frustrated" with the SAG's Zimbabwe policy. Under Zuma's administration, Tsvangirai expects a greater push for resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis. However, he said, "I haven't picked out what Zuma thinks is the solution."

FORGET THE LEADERSHIP, GO TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN PEOPLE

15. (C) Tsvangirai signaled a tactical change for winning South Africa's support. He said, "Perhaps we are making a mistake by talking to the leadership." MDC plans to reach out to civil society, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party, in an effort to intensify South African public pressure on its own government. When Ambassador Bost asked him whether MDC would engage the ANC's rival party, the Congress of the People (COPE), Tsvangirai said he was doubtful COPE could help, but would "have to" meet with them because they are part of civil society. Tsvangirai said the SAG would be more responsive to the South African people than to MDC.

MUGABE NOT EXPECTED TO AGREE TO MDC DEMANDS

16. (C) On January 8, MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett, who attended the strategy meeting, told poloff although MDC does not expect Zanu-PF to agree to its demands, the party does not want to be perceived as the "spoiler" of the GPA by walking away from negotiations. That line of thinking is consistent with Tsvangirai's comments regarding unaccounted-for abductees. He told Ambassador Bost he thought it was significant that the public now knows the state is responsible for abductions of MDC supporters and other civil society members. He indicated no intention of following through on his threat to suspend negotiations and contact with Zanu-PF if all abductees were not released or charged by January 1, 2009.

17. (C) Bennett reiterated to poloff some of MDC's outstanding issues: equity in allocation of governors, equal distribution of ministerial portfolios, the constitution and composition of the National Security Council and appointment of senior government officials. (Note: Outstanding issues Bennett did not mention are a sunset clause on any Government of National Unity and rescission of Mugabe's appointment of Johannes Tomana as attorney general and reappointment of Gideon Gono as central bank governor.) Bennett said MDC would not share the Ministry of Home Affairs as instructed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) following its November 9 summit. (Note: MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa and Tsvangirai's chief lawyer Innocent Chagonda have expressed to Embassy Harare a willingness to share Home Affairs.)

MDC VAGUE ON STRATEGY TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON ZANU-PF

18. (C) In light of Mugabe's publicly-stated intention to form a government unilaterally by the end of February, the MDC is gearing up to increase pressure on Zanu-PF to give up power as per plan B, according to Bennett. Tsvangirai told Ambassador Bost they would pressure Mugabe until he changes his "paradigm." He said, "We are reaching a tipping point where Mugabe has no option but to settle the crisis or the country will plunge into the unknown." Tsvangirai believes the collapse of the local currency and subsequent dollarization of the economy will force the regime to concede power as it does not have the capacity to cover the government payroll using U.S. dollars. Tsvangirai acknowledged the resilience of Mugabe and Zanu-PF. He said during the 1998-2000 timeframe, "(MDC leaders) were so naive. We thought we were just going to vote Mugabe out. We

underestimated the depth and determination of this group." Tsvangirai said former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo told him in a recent meeting that he thinks Mugabe wants to die in office.

¶9. (C) In spite of Ambassador Bost's efforts to elicit a specific plan of action, Tsvangirai was vague about how MDC would increase pressure on the Mugabe regime, saying only that fighting a dictatorship using democratic means is difficult, like "fighting with your bare hands." Bennett said MDC would enact a 90 day plan, culminating at the end of March in mass demonstrations in every province to coincide with the celebration of the party's 10th anniversary. He said MDC would conduct an internal party audit to determine Qsaid MDC would conduct an internal party audit to determine and fill gaps in the party structure created by loss of party leaders at the provincial, district, and ward levels. Bennett said the party would use its majority position in Parliament to pass bills and repeal laws in an effort to put the regime on the defensive.

MDC REQUESTS RESOURCES

¶10. (C) Ambassador Bost asked Tsvangirai what the MDC wanted from the USG. Tsvangirai's only response was "resources." Bennett made the same appeal, emphasizing the danger of the party becoming beholden to individuals who make large donations that come with "conditions." Bennett thanked the USG for sanctions, which he said were "extremely effective". He offered as an example that sanctions target John Bredencamp had approached him, proposing an exchange of information for support to get him off the sanctions list. Bennett said the information was regarding companies that were being blackmailed into financing Zanu-PF. He offered to share more concrete information with poloff in the future.

¶11. (C) Bennett said the Standing Committee used the meeting to solve internal problems, including agreement to channel all incoming and outgoing funds through the party treasury as some funding had been given directly to individual MDC members. Bennett asked whether US Embassy Pretoria could transfer funding proposals from MDC-South Africa to USAID Harare. He said it was safer and more secure to conduct business in South Africa than in Zimbabwe. Poloff agreed to raise this with Mission Harare.

TSVANGIRAI TALKS TO EUROPEANS ABOUT MUGABE AND ELECTIONS

¶12. (C) In a meeting on January 9 with European and Australian diplomats, Tsvangirai said MDC would accept a power-sharing government that included Mugabe, according to Australian political officer Matthew Skelly. Tsvangirai also told them that calls from the international community for Mugabe to step down were not helpful, according to Skelly. (Note: Some observers of the Zimbabwe crisis have criticized Western countries for their statements calling for Mugabe to step down. They say this provokes Mugabe to take an even more intransigent position in the power-sharing negotiations and plays into Mugabe's hands by adding ammunition to his favorite denouncement of MDC as a puppet of the West.) Tsvangirai told them the MDC was not aiming for fresh elections at this stage because they would end up in the same place they are now with Mugabe refusing to cede power. In a direct contradiction, Bennett told poloff MDC would lobby the international community for a UN Security Council resolution, more sanctions and using their good offices to influence the Southern African Development Community (SADC) member countries with the end goal of internationally-supervised elections.

TSVANGIRAI'S RETURN TO ZIMBABWE

¶13. (C) Tsvangirai said he plans to return to Zimbabwe on January 15 or 16. (Note: Tsvangirai appeared perturbed when asked about his return to Zimbabwe, defending his decision to stay outside by saying that leading a struggle such as this one "has been done before" from outside the country.

According to Skelly, Tsvangirai snapped at the British diplomat who asked about this when she pressed him for a more specific timeframe than the vague response he gave.) Bennett said Tsvangirai would return first to Botswana to meet with President Seretse Khama before returning to Zimbabwe.

Tsvangirai did not mention a return to Botswana. Neither Tsvangirai nor Bennett had definitive knowledge of Mugabe's location or travel plans.

¶14. (C) Comment: Tsvangirai did not articulate a strategy for achieving MDC's objective of pressuring Zanu-PF into giving up power nor did he convey a sense of urgency despite conditions on the ground in Zimbabwe. In separate meetings, both he and Bennett said MDC leaders were tired. Tsvangirai seemed satisfied with the strategy meeting and hopeful MDC would win out in the end. Of concern is the fact that Tsvangirai and Bennett provided apparently conflicting information about MDC objectives. After three days together, the MDC leadership is still unable to deliver a consistent message regarding its playbook.

BOST